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Alexandra Armada  
alexandra.armada@gmail.com

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# The Influence of Nurse Image on the Future of Nursing

Alexandra Armada

Faculty Sponsor: Kim Amer, PhD, RN  
DePaul University School of Nursing



## BACKGROUND

Although the profession is highly respected, the nursing shortage is still an issue today (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). One of the main reasons for this lack of interest in nursing can be due to young people misunderstanding the profession, a consequence stemming from society’s skewed views on overall nurse image, and what it actually means to be a nurse. Traditional mindsets regarding the nursing profession still exist as evidence that nursing is not being recognized for its unique and expansive spectrum, which leads to a severe lack of understanding of the of the profession. Understanding what determines the attractiveness of nursing as a profession can be identified first by examining prospective nursing students and what resources are available to them. There is a need to improve nurse image to accurately reflect scholarship and professionalism, for this ultimately affects the future of the nursing, and could lead to appropriate professional recognition and positive influence on individuals entering the field of nursing.

## OBJECTIVE

To explore what research literature exists regarding the image of the nursing profession – specifically how nursing is misunderstood, due to traditional views of the profession or overall current public misconception, and to examine the societal impact of nurse image on the future of nursing.

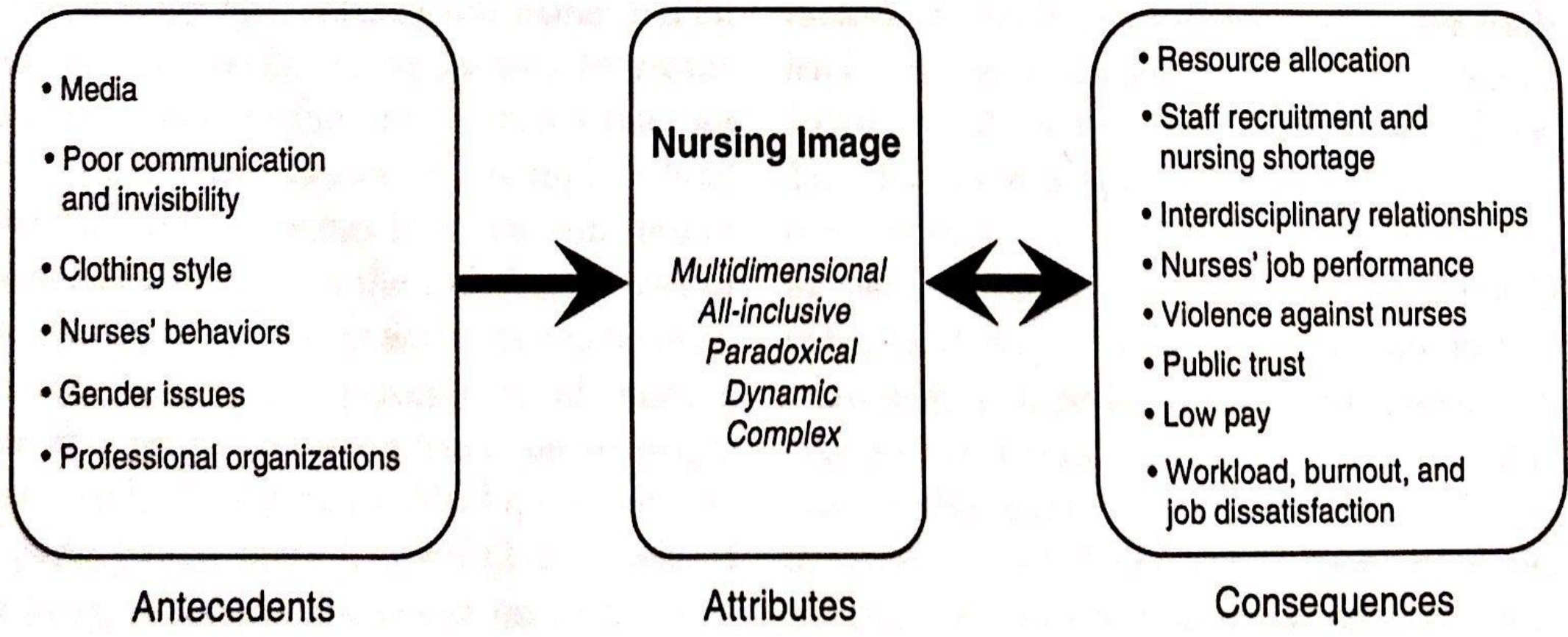
## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This review followed the framework surrounding the concept of nurse image (NI). The concept of nurse image (NI) is directly related to the nursing profession and the future of nursing, as it is “associated with the decision to enter nursing, remain in it and/or suggesting it to others as a career choice” (Rezaei-Adaryani, Salsali, & Mohammadi, 2012).

NI is defined as multidimensional, all-inclusive, paradoxical, dynamic and complex, and is made up of four dimensions:

- (1) public’s perception of nursing
- (2) nurses’ (student nurse and practicing nurse) individual and collective image of their profession, or nurses’ self-image or professional identity
- (3) nurses’ perception of the public’s image of nursing, and
- (4) image of nursing in the media or media image of nursing (2012).

Antecedents are factors that contribute to the formation of NI, such as the media and communication between the community of nurses and the public. Consequences are the effects that NI has on the nursing profession, such as public trust, and interdisciplinary relationships. Understanding the concept of NI can assist the nursing profession in moving away from negative stereotypes and build a more accurate and positive image for the nursing profession.



**Figure 1.** Nursing Image (NI) represented by its attributes, its antecedents which contribute into NI, and its consequences which result from NI.

## METHODS

An integrative literature review was conducted to determine the current knowledge surrounding nurse image, and the influence that nurse image and its implications for the future of nursing. A literature review was chosen for this study to evaluate and compile resources that currently exist and identify any gaps in research that would indicate the need for improvement (Burns, Groves & Gray, 2013). This review also explored the existing resources for future nurses and nursing students, as a representation or misrepresentation of overall nurse image. Understanding the relationship of evolving nurse image and the future of nursing can aid in planning for the nursing profession. After the data collection process, the sources were synthesized and analyzed as outlined in the Burns, Groves, and Gray (2013) text. A data review matrix was utilized and literature was categorized. A total of nine research studies from 2009 to 2019 were selected and analyzed.

## RESULTS

Nine studies were analyzed pertaining to the current nurse image (NI) and overall image of the nursing profession (see Table 1). The literature revealed misconceptions between perceptions of the nursing profession and the reality of the nursing profession, indicating severe misrepresentation of nursing, and the need for realistic and accurate information about nursing at all levels of society. Factors influencing perception of NI include family and relatives, the media, significant others and personal factors (Fillman, 2015). Themes found regarding NI as a result of this study include persisting misrepresentation of nurses, individual nurse self-concept and professional identity, the largely unknown education requirements of nursing, the lack of knowledge of what nurse professionals actually do, and the opportunity for career diversity for nurses. The studies were also analyzed for the NI misconceptions that exist based on resources for “prospective nurses,” students ranging from elementary to college, and include existing literature related to nurse image (children’s books), career counselors, and individual youth perception of nursing. These findings as well as their nursing implications related to NI are included in Table 2.

## CURRENT VIEWS ON NURSE IMAGE (NI)

**Table 1. Current Views on Nurse Image (NI) and Nursing as a Profession**

Author, year	Purpose of study	Findings related to NI and overall professional image
Price & Hall (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The history of nurse imagery</li><li>• implications NI has on nurse recruitment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• historical images of nursing are a source of both inspiration and dissonance</li><li>• nurse image is centered on characteristics of kindness, passion and caring, which can trivialize the complexity and knowledge base of nursing practice</li></ul>
Cabaniss (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Educating nurses on how to impact change in nursing’s image</li><li>• history of evolving nurse image</li><li>• Implications of nurse image</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nursing is misrepresented due to lack of understanding of what nurses do</li><li>• If nurses get more involved in the public then nurses will have increased voice and visibility</li><li>• A more accurate voice will improve nurse image and will lead to increased voice and visibility of nursing, and will positively impact nurse recruitment, nursing salaries, and nursing image</li></ul>
Hoeve, Jansen, & Roodbol (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• discussion of the influence of the public image on the self-concept and the professional identity of nurses</li><li>• An analysis of factors that influence the self-concept of nurses</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The nursing profession continues to suffer from: influence of traditional values and cultural and social norms with respect to gender and professional status, communication of nurses with the public and the invisibility of nurses in the media</li><li>• Factors that influence the self-concept of nurses: work environment, public image, work values, education, traditional social and cultural values</li><li>• Factors that influence nurses’ job satisfaction and self-concept: education, presence of preceptors, work environment and work values</li><li>• inaccurate nurse image is partly self-created by nurses due to their invisibility and their lack of public discourse</li></ul>
Glerean, Hupli, Talman, & Haavisto (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Young peoples’ perceptions of the nursing profession: An integrative review.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• young people’s perception of the nursing profession has not changed over the last ten years</li><li>• Factors that affect young people’s perceptions of the nursing profession: family, friends, significant people (teachers and career services), media, and personal factors</li><li>• career advisors’ information to young people on the nursing profession has been stated to be outdated and negative</li><li>• the media influence, especially use of stereotypes, were stated to have a negative influence on the perceptions</li></ul>
Fillman (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determining career interest in young people</li><li>• Explore the perception in undecided and nursing undergraduate students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• research findings: individuals in nursing careers, nursing students in various degree granting programs, and non-nursing students have held a generally low perception of nursing because they felt that the public views nursing poorly</li><li>• Young people’s perceptions of nursing are outdated, unrealistic</li><li>• Young people’s description of nursing: poor working conditions, shift work, limited autonomy, inferior to doctors’ work, described the status of nursing as low in society, no recognition of educational requirements or the career pathways in nursing</li></ul>

## EXISTING RESOURCES FOR PROSPECTIVE NURSES

**Table 2. Resources Available to Prospective Nurses & Implications for Nurse Image (NI)**

Author, year	Purpose of study	Students’ Age	Available Resources	Findings related to NI
Carroll & Rosa (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Qualitative media analysis on children’s books that mentioned nurses and/or healthcare</li><li>• research the role of careers adviser &amp; their perception of nursing</li><li>• framework: symbolic interactionism</li></ul>	Elementary school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 30 children’s books, for ages pre-K to 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade</li><li>• Inclusion Criteria: published years 1952 to 2013, written in English language, fiction and non-fiction</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seven themes were discovered in nurse portrayals: nurse unlikely, nurse minimal, nurse caring, nurse subordination, nurse skillful, nurse diversity, and nurse obvious</li><li>• in this sample of children’s literature, inaccurate portrayals of nurses and their roles</li><li>• young children’s literature is an important first exposure to nursing</li><li>• Future children’s books could be authored by nurses ⇒ accurate portrayal of contemporary nursing practice ⇒ contribute to an improved nurse image</li></ul>
Williams, Dickstein-Fischer, & Emery; (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explore how school counselors perceive the nursing profession</li><li>• career development for middle and high school students interested in nursing as a career</li></ul>	Middle school; High school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High school counselors</li><li>• High school counselors’ perception of nursing</li><li>• Counselor’s knowledge in recruitment for nursing profession</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Counselors are not informed properly on changes in nursing professional tracks or current regulatory and policy changes which can affect nursing practice</li><li>• counselors may not see the importance of advocating for students interested in nursing to consider the four-year university experience – bachelors in nursing versus associate degree</li></ul>
Degazon, Natan, Shaw, & Ehrenfeld (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• compare perceptions of nursing as a career compared to their perceptions of “an ideal career”</li></ul>	High school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perceptions of students (based on cultural &amp; societal influences)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Results: students did not perceive nursing as an ideal care</li><li>• Serious disparities between their perceptions of an ideal career and of nursing as a career</li><li>• Misperception of nursing: not academically challenged, limited opportunity for leadership, limited autonomy, and earning less money than they would want in an ideal career</li></ul>
Latham, Morris-Thompson, & Plata (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explore role of careers advisers, perception of nursing</li><li>• explore factors that affect perceptions of nursing &amp; nurse recruitment</li></ul>	High school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Career advisers for students</li><li>• career adviser’s knowledge in recruitment for nursing profession</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Results: advisers have a mixed levels of personal knowledge about the nursing profession</li><li>• To recruit high caliber prospective nurses, clear and accurate nurse image is needed regarding nurse roles, and requirements and entry routes/career paths in nursing</li></ul>
Fillman (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• to improve nursing recruitment and retention</li><li>• conceptual framework: context of career choice</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• College/university</li><li>• Undergraduate (nursing majors and undecided majors)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Career Choice Survey: a combination of the Career Search Questionnaire (CSQ) and Perceptions of Professional Nursing Tool (PPNT)</li><li>• survey composed of demographic questions and questions related to the research hypothesis on: career interest, self-efficacy, and public image</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Results: individuals in nursing careers, nursing students in various degree granting programs, and non-nursing students have held a generally low perception of nursing because they felt that the public views nursing poorly</li><li>• Young people description of the nature of nursing: poor working conditions, shift work, limited autonomy, inferior to doctors’ work, described the status of nursing as low in society, kind and caring people who work hard but are less intellectual, no recognition of educational requirements or the career pathways in nursing</li><li>• The factors influencing these perceptions: family and relatives, friends, media, significant others and personal factors</li></ul>

## LIMITATIONS

The following limitations could have prevented some relevant articles from being identified or analyzed:

- English language only
- responder bias due to the use of self-reported surveys
- lack of a conceptual framework in some of the studies analyzed

## NURSING IMPLICATIONS

- Building an accurate nurse image through exposure to the nursing profession through media, is important for positively influencing society’s perception of nurses as well as positively influencing each individual nursing professional’s personal and professional identity.
- Nurses can get involved in the public and political arenas of power to provide a voice for the community and educate the public on actual nursing work to help build a realistic nurse image.
- Providing realistic information to the public can result in accurate nursing portrayal in the media and the implementation of proper career counseling to younger populations.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

The knowledge gap that suggests a need for future research on the factors that influence young students and how to attract and retain future nurses, as a means to improve overall nurse image, and secure the future of nursing. Future research can start with comprehending how the public and young people describe the actual work of a nurse and correcting any misconceptions in nurse image.

- How nurses and nurse educators can further future research:
- For prospective nurses: focus on factors that affect career choices and development of effective nurse recruitment strategies
  - For the current community of nurses: focus on the development of continuing education that furthers nurse recruitment efforts.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this IRL was to use existing research to explore the concept of nurse image and its societal impact on future aspiring nurses. The focus was on examining existing literature on nurse image in comparison to existing resources for prospective nurses. Currently, there are several misconceptions regarding nurse image that persist, and the impact of inaccurate NI can be seen in the lack of resources available to those considering the nursing profession. NI is multi-dimensional, dynamic, and complex by definition, and therefore has the ability to positively change and improve the future of the nursing profession. The community of nurses is ultimately responsible for its overall image and has the ability to communicate its scholarship and professionalism more effectively, as long as individuals step up in taking initiative towards a positive nurse image.